

WHAT WE DO *makes a difference*

The National Aging Services Network— Tailoring Services to Meet the Needs of Older Americans



On two occasions, Robin Thornhill, 46, of Alexandria, Virginia, found herself tapping into the resources the National Aging Services Network provides for seniors and their caregivers. Robin, along with many other caregivers and older Americans, learned first hand the importance of having access to resources to help her grandmother lead an active, independent life.

“My grandmother, who was part

Seminole Indian and African American, had always been very active working at the carry-out restaurant she and her late husband had purchased, until her early 70s when she decided to retire. However, she didn’t want to just sit home; she wanted to find some part-time work,” said Thornhill. “So I called the local area agency on aging number, and I discovered the social services senior placements, where they found her a job three days a week working as a cook for a child day care center.”

Since 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has provided funding for services to meet the diverse needs of older persons in the United States through the National

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Aging Services Network (the Network). Headed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), the Network consists of

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Services Network...cont'd.

federal, state, and local agencies that help ensure that older Americans and their families have the information and assistance they need to make informed decisions and choices. These choices help families care for their loved ones, help older people stay in their homes, and provide care options other than nursing home facilities.

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Robin's grandmother continued working until, at age 84, she started becoming a little forgetful and needed some additional assistance. Robin again called the area agency on aging. The agency conducted an assessment and helped arrange adult day care and transportation services for Robin's grandmother.

"By this time, my grandmother had special needs, and the center assisted in those areas and provided an option for us so that we didn't have to admit her to a nursing home," said Robin, who provided care until her grandmother died at age 88.

The Network, through state and local providers, serves as a gateway to services for older people and their caregivers. Through the Network, services and support such as information and assistance, adult day care, elder abuse prevention, home-delivered meals, and services for caregivers are provided to older Americans and their families. In addition, the Network can help arrange supportive services ranging from

transportation to and from medical appointments, grocery, and drug stores to handyman, chore, and personal care services.

Programs that teach older adults how a healthier lifestyle can help them to enjoy a higher quality of life are also offered through the Network. This includes educating them and their caregivers about chronic diseases that can be prevented by staying physically active, eating a proper diet, getting regular medical screenings, and maintaining a meaningful social life.

To help navigate the National Aging Services Network, the AoA created the Eldercare Locator, a national toll-free public directory assistance service and Web site. Whether the user is an older individual who requires assistance or a caregiver who is seeking support to meet a loved one's needs, the Eldercare Locator can help give that person a head start in finding a solution to the problem.

"The Eldercare Locator is an important tool especially for long distance caregivers to find services in the communities where their loved ones live," said Daniel A. Quirk, Ph.D., executive director, National Association of State Units on Aging.

Ken Beausoleil of Denver agrees. "My 82-year-old uncle lives 700 miles away and needs transportation for medical treatments three days a week. Once I found out about the Eldercare Locator, I was pointed in the right direction for a reliable transportation service. Imagine—we thought the only difference between my uncle going to a nursing home or staying in his own home was a ride," stated Beausoleil. When he called the Eldercare Locator from his Denver office, Beausoleil was

transferred directly to the Kansas office in his uncle's hometown. Long-distance caregivers save time, long distance charges, and energy by making just one call.

"With today's mobile society, many families are spread out all over the country. Long-distance caregiving can be difficult if you don't know where to turn for help," said Sandy Markwood, chief executive officer of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

As the nation celebrates Older American Month, learn more about the National Aging Services Network by visiting www.aoa.gov. To locate services in your or your loved one's community, visit www.eldercare.gov or call the Eldercare Locator, between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday, at 1-800-677-1116. Remember that "What We Do Makes a Difference."